

Wisdom Works:

Building Better Communities

An Initiative to Foster Increased Civic Engagement

Among People Aged 60+

An Opportunity to Apply

For Development Grants

A program of

Made possible by a generous grant from

Background

Demographic trends in the United States point to the growth of the largest, healthiest, and best-educated generation of older Americans in the nation's history. Adults aged 60+ represent a growing resource of time, energy and talent with the potential to competently address community problems nationwide. *Wisdom Works: Building Better*

Communities, a National Council on the Aging-MetLife Foundation initiative has as its goal increasing civic engagement, that is, "collective actions by older people in volunteer teams engaged in addressing critical community needs."

A recent survey conducted for NCOA and MetLife Foundation by Harris Interactive revealed that "having something meaningful to do" in retirement would have the most favorable impact on future quality of life. Other studies confirm that the socialization, friendship, and sense of accomplishment developed through this type of volunteer service helps to promote improved health, a feeling of optimism, and a higher quality of life.

Very few of the survey participants wanted to "take it easy and relax most days" in their retirement years. Despite the proven value of becoming involved in one's community, and the stated desires of this segment of the population group to perform community volunteer work, less than half of them actually do so. In fact, service falls off sharply after retirement, and civic engagement among older Americans is lower than any other age group according to the study, "America's Untapped Resource" by Civic Ventures. This is corroborated by the recent study by the University of Maryland Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), "The Civic

and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait.” The Center assessed civic engagement among four cohorts – “DotNet” (age 15-25), “Generation X” (age 26-37), “Baby Boomers” (age 38-55), and “Matures” (age 55+). They found that while the Matures are the most politically active age group (in terms of voting and actively supporting candidates or issues), they lag behind younger people in their involvement with community service.

One of the explanations for this divergence between intention and reality, when it comes to community involvement, can be found in “The New Faces of Retirement” study conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates for Civic Ventures in 2002. The study found that, “Despite continuing gains in the field of service, meaningful opportunities on the ground lag. If all the people who have expressed an interest in significant public service roles actually turned out, there would be no way to accommodate them. A lot of work has to be done to define the need, create the infrastructure and build capacity.”

The coming retirement of 76 million baby boomers will almost certainly force redefinition of growing older in this country. According to a recent NCOA study, “American Perceptions of Aging in the 21st Century,” 80% of today’s Baby Boomers (age 35-53) report that they expect to do volunteer work in their later years. More than 50% of this group says “using their skills” will be important.

Will more retirees turn to community service as a means to sustain their vitality and build their communities? To achieve this outcome, America will need to develop the organizations that invite, facilitate and channel the time and talent of retired people. It will need to develop compelling new opportunities enabling older Americans to make genuine contributions, educate the public about this connection, and develop volunteer

opportunities that are meaningful to the participants, both in terms of outcome and nature of their involvement.

Project Description

The *Wisdom Works: Building Better Communities* initiative is one solution to addressing these needs. Through a multi-dimensional approach, the initiative will embrace strategies to increase awareness of the public and to enable self-directed “teams” of older people—with minimal support and guidance from organizational or agency staff—to reach beyond their individual personal lives to address specific community problems that they, along with a number of their peers, have a passion to solve. The teams will identify the issues to be addressed, the tangible results they want to produce, and define the strategy to achieve defined results. Producing and publicizing results and the strategies used to mobilize volunteers will showcase for the broader community the strength and resilience of mature Americans in contemporary society.

Through funding from MetLife Foundation, NCOA will award community demonstration grants, of up to \$12,500 each, to a community-based group in each of eight different communities throughout the U.S. Those receiving grants will be groups that, through their letters of interest, best demonstrate:

- the capacity to effectively form and engage self-directed teams of older adult volunteers to address specific community problems;
- the likelihood of achieving tangible, lasting results;
- the potential and power of self-directed volunteer teams;

the utilization and showcasing of the skills, abilities and knowledge-base of the volunteers;

the likelihood of being replicated in other communities.

Through identifying, funding, and later promoting replicable demonstration projects, and by conducting significant media outreach, the ***Wisdom Works: Building Better Communities*** initiative seeks to enable teams of older adults to identify and plan specific volunteer strategies that will effectively address critical community problems and improve the quality of life for older adults by giving meaning to their desires to invest their time and skills in their communities.

Demonstration Grants Program

Demonstration grants will foster development of self-directed teams of older adult volunteers to address critical needs within local communities and develop new roles to effectively utilize the skills, abilities and life experiences of the 60+ population.

Especially desired are projects that effectively utilize self-managed, diverse teams of mature volunteers and that develop senior volunteer leadership. Senior volunteer teams will utilize their skills to identify the most critical problems in their community, select the problem upon which they feel they can have the most impact, and develop strategies aimed at solving or minimizing it. The teams may need to develop additional resources to impact the community problem. The outcome will be a tangible result demonstrating the impact of the volunteers.

The following are examples of the many types of community demonstrations that could be supported:

Ballfield Constructed by a NORC. Leaders of a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) concerned that the absence of outdoor play areas in their neighborhood contributes to juvenile crime and truancy mobilize fellow residents to develop a ballfield in partnership with a youth group and service organization or public agency.

Retired Teachers Conduct Voter Registration/Education Drive. A local chapter of a retired teacher organization, troubled by voter turnout in a low-income area in their community, establishes voter registration tables in churches, grocery stores, and other community gathering places. They also work in conjunction with other community groups to research and publish a non-partisan guide to important issues in the election to distribute in these same locations in advance of the election.

Senior Center Corps Partners with Youth to Establish Community Garden. A group of senior center members, convinced of a cause-and-effect connection between community crime, truancy and the lack of high quality after-school programs, forms a community corps to establish an after-school program for fourth and fifth graders. Working together with the youth of the community, they develop a “Green Garden Project” that will establish a community garden, provide a hands-on activity for the students in growing food, and train them in techniques to nurture gardens. The Corps also plans to offer tips on basic nutrition, give some of the crops to the youthful workers, and sell a portion to fund an agreed-upon youth activity.

The types of programs envisioned, and the community problems they address, are intentionally very broad to accommodate local circumstances and volunteer interest. The primary goal is for the seniors to identify the problems themselves, develop workable

strategies to address the problems, mobilize volunteer teams to implement the strategies, partner with other community groups (where appropriate), and be able to point to tangible results upon completion.

In one of our samples above, the result was a physical entity; in another, the result was a broader, more diverse electorate with knowledge of the issues; in the third, the result was fewer children on the streets after schools, better nutrition, and valuable training and funding for another community program. Issues may range from education to recreation, from the environment to arts and culture. They can focus on seniors, children, families, or the entire community. The field is wide open.

While there are many outstanding community volunteer programs that help individuals, this program aims to raise the bar of volunteerism to address broad community needs and capture the desires of new generations of older Americans to become engaged in their community.

It is envisioned that sponsoring organizations may choose to solicit existing community-based groups to become partners in proposed projects.

Because the awards are demonstration grants, emphasis will be placed upon initiative, leadership development, and providing tangible, lasting results to the community. The project must be easy to replicate in other communities, or with other groups within the same community. The initiative will not provide grants for research, feasibility studies or operating support of existing programs.

Grantees will be announced April 15, 2004 and projects selected for funding are expected to begin by May 1, 2004. The grant period will be 12 months, with a final report submitted by July 1, 2005.

The national program office for ***Wisdom Works: Building Better Communities***, located at the National Council on the Aging, provides overall direction and disseminates information for the grants program. NCOA will monitor the projects and provide guidance as requested or needed.

As a condition of accepting grant funds, grantees must meet the NCOA requirements for submitting final financial and narrative reports. Grantee project managers may be asked to participate in conference calls and to give progress reports on their projects. Grantees will be required to use the project name and acknowledge the funding of NCOA and MetLife Foundation in all marketing, public relations or printed materials for the project.

At the close of the grant, project managers are expected to provide a comprehensive written report, suitable for wide dissemination, on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project with particular attention to the leadership and involvement of the senior volunteers and to the tangible benefits of the program. These reports will be disseminated by the ***Wisdom Works: Building Better Communities*** program office and NCOA. Since media attention is an important component of this initiative, project directors are expected to be available for media interviews as necessary.

Applying for Development Grants

Eligibility

Nonprofit 501 (c) (3) charitable organizations (or equivalent) agencies, institutions, or government agencies are eligible to apply for this grant. Eligible organizations include, but are not limited to:

- Community-based organizations (including civic and fraternal groups, retiree groups, youth groups, faith-or ethnic-based groups, senior centers, youth centers, volunteer corps, etc.).
- Tribal organizations
- Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) that have a 501(c) (3) or are housed under such an organization or equivalent organization.
- Senior citizen communities
- State and local government agencies (including offices on aging, community action agencies, housing service, and community development agencies, etc.).
- Public or private schools (including charter schools and religious schools).

Selection Criteria

Letters of interest will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- The extent to which the project has a clear focus on meeting the most critical social needs of its local community, describes specific, attainable

outcomes, and is likely to produce tangible, lasting results to the community.

- The clarity of roles including, but not limited to, leadership, planning, project and organizational development, project coordination and management, and the degree of direct involvement of senior volunteers in all phases of the project, from inception and planning through execution and evaluation.
- The extent to which the project design includes a broad array of roles and responsibilities that can utilize a range of skills, backgrounds and abilities of senior volunteers.
- The extent to which the project addresses problems that exist in other communities and identifies core elements that have replication potential in these communities.
- The effectiveness of plans for developing visibility for the project through media, and for recognizing project accomplishments and the contributions of the volunteers.
- The extent to which the sponsoring group demonstrates a relationship and management approach that is consistent with self-managed teams and demonstrates an ability to implement a demonstration project.
- The extent to which the project structure ensures that the sponsoring organization has fiduciary responsibility for the project.

- The number of seniors involved in the project and the extent to which the volunteer management plan demonstrates an ability to recruit, manage, mentor, and evaluate a diverse group of volunteers.
- The capacity and intent of the sponsoring group to continue the project after the conclusion of the demonstration grant.

A primary consideration in making awards will be to represent geographic, ethnic, gender, and racial diversity of grantees and communities served.

Instructions for Applications and Letters of Interest

APPLICATION: An official ***Wisdom Works: Building Better Communities*** Demonstration Grant

Application Form may be downloaded by visiting <http://www.ncoa.org> and clicking on the link in the upper right corner for *press room*. The form must be completed in full, including the Letter of Interest section.

DUE DATE: December 15, 2003. Applications and Letters must be received by close of business December 15, 2003 at the e-mail address listed below.

FORMAT: Please complete the Official Application Form, along with the Letter of Interest, and

submit via e-mail to the address below. Only e-mail submissions will be accepted.

LENGTH: Up to six double-spaced pages (12pt. font), plus the cover page, in MS Word.

CONTENT: Brief description of the sponsoring organization and the proposed project specifically addressing the selection criteria listed above.

BUDGET: A detailed line-item budget is not required for the Letter of Interest. However, one paragraph should discuss the budget needs and estimate the total budget and future funding plans.

APPENDICES: Attachments or appendices (résumés, letters of support, charts, etc.) will not be read by the reviewers for the selection of finalists; therefore, do not include any attachments or appendices.

Send official Application form and Letter of Interest (as an attachment) via e-mail to: *wisdom.works@ncoa.org*

Timetable

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|----------------|---|
| DEC. 15, 2003 | Deadline for receipt of Applications and Letters of Interest. |
| JAN. 30, 2004 | Finalists announced and invited to submit full proposals. |
| MARCH 15, 2004 | Deadline for receipt of proposals from finalists. |
| APRIL 15, 2004 | Grantees announced at Annual Joint Conference of the National Council on the Aging and the American Society on Aging. |
| MAY 1, 2004 | Projects begin |
| JULY 1, 2005 | Final report on projects due. |

Wisdom Works: Building Better Communities

Advisory Committee

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Founded in 1950, **The National Council on the Aging** is the nation's first charitable organization dedicated to promoting the dignity, independence, well-being, and contributions of older Americans.

NCOA serves as a national voice and powerful advocate on behalf of older Americans. NCOA is an innovator, developing programs such as BenefitsCheckUp®, Foster Grandparents and Family Friends.

NCOA is an activator, working with its thousands of community organization members nationwide to provide needed services to older people.

For more information on NCOA, please go to: <http://www.ncoa.org/>.

MetLife Foundation supports a variety of initiatives related to aging. Since 1986, the Foundation has made grants of \$8.5 million for research on Alzheimer's disease through the MetLife Foundation Awards for Medical Research program. The Foundation has also provided support to the national Alzheimer's Association for several educational initiatives as well as support for a traveling exhibit on Memory.

Through its Healthy Aging initiative, MetLife Foundation supports projects that provide opportunities for older adults to participate in volunteer activities as well as projects to enhance lifelong learning and help older adults achieve and maintain successful and healthy aging.

For more information about the Foundation, please go to: <http://www.metlife.org/>

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